



Concerning Notation

OVER the centuries, Byzantine music notation became increasingly more specific.¹ That is to say, later composers chose to write particular musical phrases with more notes than those of earlier composers. In other words, the later composers wrote out ornamental formulas in full, whereas in the past, these would have been left to the skill and experience of the chanters. This clarification did not purport to add anything new to a given melody, but rather it spelled out the way in which the tune was intended to be chanted in order to eliminate erroneous interpretations. Even today, a chanter following Byzantine notation is still expected to “interpret” a musical phrase based on the oral tradition he has inherited from his mentor. Interpreting a musical phrase entails chanting a tone with a certain élan or adding notes to a phrase. For example, the ancient Byzantine music symbol “apoderma” (—), as sung in the post-Byzantine era, appears in modern Byzantine notation as:



Transcribed literally into Western notation, this phrase would appear simply as:



However, most chanters with even a rudimentary knowledge of the oral tradition would perform it in the following way:



¹ cf. Tillyard, H.J.W., *Handbook of the Middle Byzantine Musical Notation*, Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae, Subsidia 1, Fasc. 1, Copenhagen, 1935, pp. 14-16.

Since this book is written for people who have had little or no experience with authentic Byzantine music and its oral traditions, an attempt has been made to include some of these interpretations by adding notes to the melody, following the example of the knowledgeable chanters of the Holy Mountain. Sometimes these additions are simple, as in the example on the previous page, and they do not complicate the melody particularly. In other instances, however, these interpretations entail adding grace notes or replacing a quarter note with an eighth note and two sixteenth notes. Such changes understandably make the music more difficult to sight-read, but this is the only practical way to preserve in Western notation these embellishments, which constitute an integral part of Byzantine music. Transcriptions that do not take into account these implied embellishments yield melodies that are a bland imitation of the original, if they are sung as written. It is to be hoped that the abundant embellishments in this book will not discourage people from using it, but on the contrary, we pray that the melodies' beauty will inspire Church singers to overcome the challenge. Certainly they will find the extra effort very rewarding. Because there are only a few ornamental musical formulas that need to be learned, the task is not as insurmountable as it may first appear to be. Those used repeatedly in this book are shown in Appendix II to facilitate familiarization.

The ison, or tonic note, of the melody is indicated by a capital letter written above the staff. This note is to be held until another letter above the staff changes the pitch of the ison. If there is more than one person holding the ison, they should take breaths at different times so that there are no breaks, even if there is a rest in the melody. Those who hold the ison may do so in octaves, but they need to be careful not to sing louder than those performing the melody. Ideally, ison holders should pronounce the words simultaneously with those singing the melody. However, the prevailing practice today is to hold a sustained *schwa* sound [ə] instead, since this neutral vowel does not clash with the vowels in the sung text. The abbreviation "Un." means that the ison singers should join in unison with the melody. The ison is almost always chanted at a pitch lower than or equal to the pitch of the melody. When the ison needs be pitched in the lower octave only, a downward-pointing arrow follows the ison note (for example, B↓). An ellipsis following the ison note (for example, C...) means that the ison should be held without stopping at the upcoming rest in the melody. Since Byzantine music is not based on absolute pitches but on the pitches of Νη-Πα-Βου (Do-Re-Mi) etc., which are relative, the entire melody may (and should) be transposed to a pitch that fits the tessitura of the singers. The tone Νη (Do) is always fixed at C throughout this anthology. Although this convention facilitates sight-reading, it makes several melodies too high for some people (especially for baritone and female voices) unless these melodies are transposed.

Tempo marks are provided merely as guidelines; they may be altered to accommodate local requirements. The tempo of the cherubic hymn may need to be altered significantly, depending on how much time the priest spends reading the prayers before the great entrance. Following current practice, the words "that we may receive the King of all" (the concluding words of the first part of the cherubic hymn) are usually chanted in a rapid monotone. But if the choristers reach this phrase before the priest is ready for the great entrance, they may bide time by chanting this phrase according to the music. To facilitate this synchronization, the approximate duration of each cherubic hymn is provided so that the choir may alter its tempo accordingly. The duration is given in three parts. For example, if the duration is: "4:30 + 1:00 + :45," this

means that the first part of the cherubic hymn lasts four and a half minutes, the phrase “that we may receive the King of all” lasts one minute, and the final part, which is chanted after the great entrance, lasts 45 seconds.

In some hymns, the English translation has a meter that is identical or similar to that of the original Greek version. In such instances, both texts are written in the same score of music. When slight modifications of the melody are made to accommodate the English version in the same score, notes that apply to only one language are written in red and enclosed in parentheses, as in the following measure:

thou who art most
την α - ει - μα - κα - ρι -
teen ah - ee - ma - kah - ree -

The melody would be chanted as follows in Greek:

την α - ει - μα - κα - ρι -
teen ah - ee - ma - kah - ree -

whereas in English, it would be:

thou who art most

In most subsections, there are several alternative melodies provided for each hymn. For example, on pages 220-221 there are five different melodies for “Glory to Thee, O Lord” following the gospel. In such instances, the first melody provided is always the simplest. This format is used throughout the book so that one may begin with something simple, and then perhaps later learn a more elaborate melody. The only exceptions to this rule are the doxologies and the communion hymns; the first melody provided for a given communion hymn is the long, elaborate version, whereas the following melodies are briefer and simpler. When a given hymn (e.g., the cherubic hymn) is set in several modes, one would typically choose a version that is either in the mode of the week or in a mode that matches another hymn chanted that day. For example, on the Annunciation when the katavasia of the ninth ode is chanted in the Divine Lit-

urgy in fourth mode, usually the cherubic hymn and the anaphora would also be chanted in the same mode.

In some very long and melismatic pieces (primarily the cherubic hymns and some communion hymns), entire sections of the melody are enclosed within large brackets. (For example, see page 228.) These sections may be omitted for brevity.

From around the fourteenth century, composers of Byzantine music have inserted meaningless consonants (such as ς [n], λ [n], and χ [h]) into long, melismatic melodies. As Dr. Conomos explains:

Two problems were solved with the introduction of these foreign sounds into the text. First, a practical one: they had the effect of abbreviating an extended melodic phrase into groups of a few notes, thereby making it easier for the soloist or the choir to sing. Secondly, it solved an aesthetic problem; the consonants erased the unpleasantness of a sustained vowel and offered an incentive to the chanter to add emphasis at certain points where the composer, scribe or psalte [i.e., chanter] thought fit.²

In transcribing the music for this book, melodies containing such consonants have been preserved unchanged. These consonants are written in parentheses in the Greek text so that it is clear that they are not a part of the words. An attempt has not been made to insert similar consonants into the English line.

Since there are no bar lines to signal measure breaks, each staff is treated as a separate measure. For this reason, an accidental placed somewhere in a staff will apply for the remainder of that staff but not for the following staff. Courtesy accidentals are placed in parentheses wherever clarification is deemed necessary.

The Byzantine music symbols that apply stress to a note (the “psefiston” and the “vareia”) are usually transcribed by placing an accent (>) above the note affected. However, these stresses in Byzantine music are usually not chanted with a significant increase in volume. Therefore, when encountering notes with accents in this book, one must be careful not to emphasize them unduly.

The “intonations” (ἀπηχήματα) that may be chanted before a hymn have been listed in Appendix III by number. The appropriate number for the intonation is provided only at the beginning of those hymns that Athonite chanters would typically precede with an intonation.

² Conomos, Dimitri E., *Byzantine Trisagia and Cheroubika of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessaloniki, 1974, p. 264.